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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building

Statement submitted by National Council for Women of Catalonia, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Introduction

Wars are an attack on human dignity and on the right of being human itself. Women and children are the principal victims of wars because they are the most defenceless and vulnerable and are the ones who suffer most as a consequence of any armed conflict.

Civil populations are a strategic target. Wars often have hidden motives of ethnic cleansing, racism and xenophobia. And it is countries' internal wars where the weak and marginalised suffer most.

All conflict leads to destruction. We only need to think of the innumerable landmines in certain countries, causing the destruction and mutilation of so many defenceless beings due to this unknown danger.

Most women in the world live in constant peril and suffer various kinds of violence, as well as many children and older people, forming the great majority of victims in conflicts due to their particular vulnerability.

There are examples of women in Bengal, Cambodia, Peru, Somalia, Bosnia, Iraq, Rwanda, Burundi, Chechnya and Liberia who have been victims of collective rape, enforced pregnancy and prostitution traffic and activities. They have suffered the worst humiliations, barbaric acts and other offences classified as crimes against humanity.

Section 7 of the Statute of Rome states that rape, sexual slavery, enforced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation and other abuses of comparable significance are crimes against humanity.

States become responsible when they suppress international norms concerning the prohibition of torture, international drug trafficking and violations of human rights against women. States are responsible for the non-application of international penal law in the twenty-first century.

This process of universal justice, which brings with it a responsibility for war crimes, is the result of the gradual effort by international law and civil society, such as NGO's, to traverse the frontiers of immunity and impunity of States and their officials in war crimes committed against women.

Injustice must be denounced, prevarication challenged, rules proposed. This is the role of women, to protest, to campaign against war, against the reasons behind violence. In order to ensure fundamental rights are protected there must be economic independence, the possibility of being educated, of being represented at all levels of decision-making in national, regional and international governments, institutions and mechanisms. It must be women who truly desire peace, who repudiate being linked politically or economically to the interests of the arms industry.

The role of women.

We see politics as the art of consensus constructed via dialogue and diversity of interests.

We need women to have normal access to positions of political decision-making concerning armed conflicts and to direct actions in order to raise the awareness of governments and opinion leaders, to raise the awareness and educate the population on all the rights of humans.

To put into effect true policies that aim to bring about a lasting development, promoting a policy of reinforcing the capacities of women and gender promotion, acknowledging their roles both as constructors of peace and decision-makers.

To bring about a true policy of harmonisation of internal legislation with international legal instruments requiring the effective application of rights. The Letter of the United Nations and

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with its additional pacts, excluding all kinds of discrimination based on religion, race, colour, sex, language, opinion, origin of the human person and nationality, must be respected by members of the International Community, as well as by individuals in the hearts of nations.

To ensure the real promotion and dissemination of legislative and regulatory texts and treaties at a national level that protect women, especially in the areas of education, information and awareness-raising.

To promote transparency in the management of public matters and to bring about true rule of law.

To support local initiatives, reinforce alliances and create resources in order to construct and develop a culture of peace.

Strategies to resolve conflicts

Women must get involved in the quest to resolve conflicts, playing a first-hand role in order to ensure their rights and opinions are heard.

To promote a democratic system of values guaranteeing the real involvement of women in politics.

To this end they must claim their role as social agents in order to influence solutions that must be fair, demanding respect for international norms established in the area of conflicts.

This role can be played via NGO's, associations and sector groups of women. Actions can take the form of marches, petitions, letters, accusations and other public and non-public manifestations.

Women can expose the painful realities they have witnessed. They must direct specific actions that ensure rapid solutions, taking into account the size of conflicts, via a global approach and exhaustive analysis of the issues present, proving their knowledge and capacity to resolve conflict by means of their tact and intuition.

They must develop true solidarity in order to construct and promote peace. They will do so by means of mediation, conciliation and reconciliation, supporting non-violent methods in order to resolve conflict. To be able to negotiate they need intense training, full information on conflicts and a greater awareness at the base.

They must promote policies that involve women in the reconstruction of destroyed structures, taking into account their concerns and interests. They have been the principal victims of these conflicts, rapes, prostitution traffic and activities, AIDS, extreme poverty and illiteracy. They must support each other in order to achieve their common goals.

Conclusions

To raise the awareness of governments, opinion leaders, influential and religious groups, women in the legal professions, the media and international organisations regarding the need to respect the rights of people, of the family, economic rights, social/cultural rights, policies on the environment and to harmonise internal legislation with international legal instruments, as well as to ensure the effective application of these texts.

To educate and inform citizens on both rights that have been recorded as well as informal rights, on the impact of armed conflicts and of the actions by insertion forces on women, girls and their role in conflicts.

To promote a culture of peace that must be constructed and developed via multiple strategies. And to promote transparency in the management of public issues, putting into place instruments that ensure good government.

To fight against all policies of exclusion, especially all kinds of discrimination, xenophobia, racism and political or religious fundamentalism.

To claim and capture a primordial role in the search for solutions, requiring that national and international norms be respected.

To promote a policy of involvement in the reconstruction of destroyed structures, taking into account gender-based specialities.

To create forums in order to explain their concerns and to coordinate their proposals for resolving crises.

To ask the United Nations to create a group of observers that can make periodic visits to countries under armed conflict that have been accused of violating the rights of women and children.

In the agreements reached to resolve conflicts, to prohibit formally any clauses providing amnesty or guaranteeing impunity, especially for all war crimes committed against women and children.